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ABSTRACT

Rural economic development requires local consensus and a coordinated effort by community leaders and the public at large. In 12 rural Georgia counties, the University of Georgia is implementing a Rural Revitalization Initiative (RRI) that emphasizes collaboration of public officials and private individuals across disciplines, professions, neighborhoods, and county lines. The project is conducted by representatives of six university service units working collaboratively with each other and the communities. The project focuses on: (1) governmental management training and technical assistance; (2) implementation of four collaborative models of community development; (3) community education about rural culture and heritage, training of rural newspaper and radio staff in community history and development, and encouragement of innovative approaches to rural community problem solving; (4) encouragement of economic growth through small business development and business retention; (5) portable simulation training systems concerned with human relations skills and group dynamics; and (6) leadership development programs. The linkage for RRI begins at the University of Georgia and extends to statewide organizations conducting economic and community development work. Additional proposed programs for any particular must build on that county's existing programming efforts. This report briefly describes five promising collaborative projects in California and Ohio. (SV)

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COLLABORATION FOR RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: WHAT'S WORKING?

by

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Collaboration for Rural Economic Development: What's Working?

Presentation at the SAAS Meeting - Little Rock, Arkansas
February 6, 1990

By: Charles Norman and Rusty Brooks
University of Georgia

Rural communities across America are going through many changes. While to many people the term rural suggests open country and small towns where farming is the primary way of life, in reality this image applies only to a small number of rural communities and fails to consider the major economic and social changes that have taken place in many rural communities since World War II. The most significant of which has been the drop in farm population from 24.3 million in 1945 to below 5 million in 1987. However, 60 million people presently live beyond metropolitan boundaries. Therefore, the term rural is used to describe differing landscapes, economics and people. Change and diversity have made many rural areas more complex and difficult to understand. (Lapping, Daniels, and Keller, 1989)

Lapping, Daniels, and Keller (1989) point out the future growth of rural areas is clouded with uncertainty. Urban areas continue to grow at a faster rate than rural areas. An important question is: How will rural people earn a living? As employment in agriculture and manufacturing continues to be vulnerable to foreign competition, the effects are quickly felt in the shops and stores of rural communities. Less money is available to maintain public services and local banks are hard pressed to justify new loans, much less to retire old loans.

While the future of rural communities appears questionable, many rural communities have been successful in their economic development activities. Many

authors (Christenson and Robinson, 1989; Lapping, Daniels, and Keller, 1989) have indicated that the success of economic development activities depends largely upon leadership, commitment and patience. Economic development cannot be mandated. Only through local consensus can a town marshal the coordinated effort necessary for economic development. Unless influential leaders and the public at large are willing to work for community economic development, not much will happen (Lapping, Daniels, and Keller, 1989). Based on this premise, the University of Georgia is implementing a Rural Revitalization Initiative in 12 counties in rural Georgia, which emphasizes collaboration. The Initiative represents both collaboration of local people--public and private--across discipline, professions, neighborhoods, and county lines.

The working definition being used to define collaboration is "two or more organizations working together is a sustained way toward common goals, each share in the planning, each contribute some resources, each receive the benefits and losses" (Loughran, 1981). Realizing that collaboration is only successful when it is implemented by a small group or a series of small groups, the project is conducted by representatives from six service units at the University of Georgia working collaboratively with each other and the communities to develop goals and objectives for the project. Not only are the goals and objectives of the program developed collaboratively by service unit representatives, but they are also implemented collaboratively in the community. Our belief is that by practicing collaboration we thus teach collaboration.

To introduce the project to the twelve counties, a meeting was held with key community leaders, which included county commissioners, mayors, council members,

chamber representatives, school system representatives, bankers, and local economic development representatives and business leaders. These community leaders were identified based on discussions with elected officials, local extension agents, representatives of the Department of Community Affairs, Association County Commissioners of Georgia, Georgia Municipal Association, and power company representatives. At meetings with community representatives, the collaborative nature of the project was explained in each county and the county leadership was asked if they were willing to become involved in the project. Once each of the counties had agreed to the collaborative nature of the project, the implementation phase of the project began. The project has six focus areas as outlined below.

The first area is that of **governmental management**. It operates on the premise that if revitalization and economic development is to occur in rural Georgia, it will require commitment and support from local government, elected officials--mayors, council members, and county commissioners. To address this need, the governmental management component of the project is working with municipal and county government officials in all twelve counties. Training and technical assistance is being offered in four areas: 1) Leadership development for elected officials, which includes strategic planning, formulating policy, and team-building; 2) Management development for county department heads and supervisors, which includes three intensive levels of training and special topic workshops; 3) Financial management training and technical assistance; and 4) Land-use planning and zoning, which includes regional workshops on zoning regulations, minimum construction codes, and infrastructure needs. The training

and technical assistance delivered through the Initiative in most cases are tailored to the specific needs of the selected municipalities and counties. During the last eighteen months, Level I of the Management Training Component and the leadership development program for elected officials has been completed in all twelve counties and municipalities, which encompasses more than 512 hours of training to the twelve county governments. The Financial Management Component has provided more than 202 hours of training to the twelve governments. The financial management training has for the most part been conducted on a one-to-one basis. This decision was made after discussions were held with local officials concerning how they were currently conducting financial management. The first land-use planning and zoning workshops will be held in March of 1990.

The second area of the project is that of community development. In this area, four collaborative models are being developed, which focus on the delivery of human services and economic development. These models concentrate energy and creativity of local, regional, and state leadership on the development of innovative ways to address rural Georgia's complex needs related to health, education, job training, child care, housing, and special populations. In each model, local government, business, and community leaders are brought to the table to set goals and design programs that can best serve the needs identified for their area. The county groups are encouraged to look beyond city and county boundaries and work with other leaders in their region in an effort to enhance the quality of life and to enrich the human capital necessary for long-term growth and prosperity. The collaborative processes used in each model emphasize

development of local talents and leadership, which establishes local expertise that can assist the community beyond the point of the grant.

Three of the collaborative models are presently being implemented.

1) A **"regional cooperation"** model is being developed in southwest Georgia where counties are looking at working collaboratively in the delivery of human services.
2) A **"rational/analytic"** model is being implemented in northeast Georgia. Work thus far on this model includes conducting a shift-share analysis to determine what the area has not received in terms of industry and manufacturing as compared to other similar regions locally and nationally. A survey is also being done to determine the need for additional retail trade. Assistance will be given to the counties to understand the results and how to use the data for economic development purposes. Copies of the results will also be forwarded to the Small Business Development Center.
3) An **"empowerment"** model is also being developed in southwest Georgia. In this model, the county leaders focus on the needs of their county, which they determined were literacy, child care, and children and youth. Local leaders have developed their goals and objectives, written grant proposals for two of the designated areas of need and received funding for all three areas. Private funding sources were found for the literacy training group.
4) The fourth and final model will be an economic development model, which is being developed and will be implemented during March of 1990.

The third area of focus is that of **rural heritage and innovation.** The Cooperative Extension Service is offering a series of seminars attracting national figures who speak and write on the attributes of rural heritage. Extension is also providing a shared education experience for community and governmental leaders for the twelve counties in which they will learn and experience some of the most innovative approaches to rural community problem-solving. Typically, these experiences involve travel outside their community as a group to locations in our regions where they can view and talk with people in other rural communities who are taking on innovative approaches to shared problems.

Also working in the area of rural heritage and innovation is the College of Mass Communications and Journalism. We feel an important part of rebuilding rural communities depends upon community members' ability to communicate with each other. Local radio stations and newspapers have always played a critical role in that sense of community. For this reason, we included community media as a part of the project. Unfortunately, rural newspapers and radio stations rarely have the resources to provide experience and education for young staff in community history and development. We have also found that few local media understand the range of economic and social policies, which influence rural communities. To assist in this area, training is planned for local rural newspapers and radio stations in rural policy, rural heritage, local problem-solving, and community development.

Work thus far in the area of rural heritage and innovation include the development and implementation of a bed and breakfast conference, which had over 100 participants.

An experiential learning activity will take place this March, which will involve three representatives from each of the twelve counties participating in the project. The College of Journalism has conducted focus group interviews in all twelve of the counties to determine the needs of community media representatives. Programs that will be implemented during the next few months addressing methods that government officials can follow in dealing with the press. In addition to the seminars that are planned, consideration is being given to the development of a computer bulletin board service where journalists can call the University of Georgia campus and download files that may be of interest to them.

The fourth focus area is that of **economic development**. However, all areas of focus are designed to assist with economic development activities. The economic development focus seeks to encourage economic growth in four communities through small business development and business retention. Toward this end a wide variety of services are offered; these include: counseling, management training, a retail opportunities model, a loan fund, and small business incubators. The program designed to develop local initiatives will service community industries to develop other products, explore exporting possibilities, and access federal and state bids. Other areas of focus address literacy and the development of high school-based businesses.

Work thus far in the economic development focus include: 1) More than 100 people from the four counties have participated in the small business counseling program; 2) Studies are being conducted in the four communities to determine how they can diversify or expand their current product line; 3) Assistance is being given to

one community to develop a marketing plan for a regional festival; 4) The high school-based business program will be implemented in two of the communities during this program year, and; 5) Six small businesses have been started in the four communities during the last eighteen months.

The fifth area of focus of the Rural Revitalization Initiative is that of **community simulation**. Portable simulation training systems are being developed based upon computer technology and the best in management and planning simulation theory in business, industry, and government. The simulation centers are designed to build human relations skills and group dynamics in a real life setting of a simulated county courthouse. Components of the simulation center are designed to be highly portable and can be incorporated in training programs in the most rural locations. Development of the simulations involve all service units working on the project. Presently, two prototypes are being reviewed--IBM InfoWindow and MacIntosh Hypercard software.

The sixth and final component of the project is that of **leadership development**. Realizing the importance of leadership development, prior to the beginning of the Rural Revitalization Initiative in any of the twelve counties a leadership development program must have been conducted by one or two groups conducting leadership development programs at the University of Georgia.

The linkage for the Rural Revitalization Initiative begins at the University of Georgia and extends to statewide organizations conducting economic development and community development work. Prior to initiating programs in any county, all service units and statewide organizations are made aware of the program. The next step in

implementing the programs in the community is to involve and inform community leaders who are working on the project. In every case, once a program is implemented in a county, any additional programs must build upon the existing programming efforts.

Evaluation of the project thus far by service unit representatives indicates that collaboration is occurring by the service unit representatives and within the counties. Community leaders indicated on a mail survey questionnaire that they were working more closely with other organizations and groups within the county to address community needs.

A review of the literature found several projects across the country being conducted through successful collaborative efforts. While the literature did not necessarily call it collaboration according to our definition of collaboration, which is "two or more organizations working together in a sustained way toward common goals, each share in the planning, each contribute some resources, each receive the benefits and losses we believe they were collaborative project." We would like to discuss three of these projects to demonstrate the impact of collaborative efforts, which we received information on from the Rural Information Center. These include:

-Three projects conducted jointly in California by Merced College and the Merced County Office of Economic and Strategic Development. The first project was a "Small Business Contracting Project." The purpose of the project was to assist small businesses gain a greater share of federal and state government contracts and sub contracts. The second program was a "Family Day Care Providers Project." The project goals were to select and train low income parents who could become

high-quality child care providers in their own licensed home operations. The third program was an Agriculture Trade Development Project. The program was designed to assist area agribusinesses secure a greater amount of trade in foreign markets, thereby reducing local unemployment, as well as increasing local exports. All three projects represent close partnerships between the college and the Office of Economic and Strategic Development combining efforts, resources, and services.

-In Lake County, California, the Small Business Resource Center was established through joint efforts of the Lake County Job Training office, the local development corporation, and the cities of Lakeport and Clearlake. The center serves existing businesses with business counseling and financial packaging assistance. During the first six months, 35 jobs were created as a result of the project. Also reasonable financing has been made available to local businesses.

-In Fayette County, Ohio, a "County-wide Cooperative Effort in Economic Development" has been achieved. The county-wide effort was achieved with the help of county commissioners, the city council, and the Ohio State University Extension Service. Successes of the project include:

1) Assisted in expansion efforts of several companies; retention of others,

2) Locating several new industries, and

3) Brought together communities, county government, and Extension in a unified approach.

We believe the success of many rural communities depend upon their ability to work collaboratively within and beyond county lines. This need becomes even more apparent

when one reviews the social and economic status of rural communities in Georgia, the south, and across the country.

An underlying goal of the Rural Revitalization Initiative at the University of Georgia is to knit together a variety of resources both traditional and non-traditional--to address current problems in economic, community, and social development, which appears to be the goal of other projects reviewed. Development of successful collaborative models may be the key to the sustainability and growth of many rural communities.

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